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[MESSAGE FROM THE CHURCH OF EAST TIMOR]

The Church which is moved by the deep conviction that it "not only has the right, but also the duty to express an authorized view" (Pope Pius XII, radio-message of June 1,1941) on events that affect the social lives of people, feels the need to throw light, through its doctrine, upon the present situation of the people of East Timor. The Church in Timor shares with the People the sorrow that oppresses it, the pain that torments it and the anguish it feels" (S.B. Antoine Pierre Khoraichei, Patriarch of Antioquia, Pastoral Letter, Lent 1976, G.S. No. 1)*.

The Church knows that the Timorese families have lost dearly beloved relatives, freedom, wealth and property; the Church is aware of the fact that minds have hardened with the terror of war, privation and exodus of the people of East Timor.

The Church in Timor, moved by the conscience of duty itself and sensitive to the appeals of many and to the voice of a great majority. believes that the moment has come to put forward the principles and standards which will enable its attitude towards the problem of the people of East Timor to be understood, whilst making no claim to call upon itself the means of solving these same problems.

In the case of East Timor, where it enjoys a close relationship with the People, the Church, in the exercise of its mission, has not remained nor can remain indifferent or divorced from the historical vicissitudes of this same People.

Conscious of its mission, the Church wishes to set down what it feels to be vital and urgent for the defense and safeguarding of the fundamental values and human rights of the people of East Timor, as well as their identity, at this historical moment in time.

F A C T S

The 25th of April of 1974 brought the people of East Timor the opportunity to exercise their unalienable rights of freedom and the ability to choose their own future.

Basing themselves on this right, recognized by the Portuguese government and promoted by the United Nations, three major political parties were formed, each with its own political ideas about how this right should be exercised. Notwithstanding the efforts of all concerned to find a solution that would safeguard the identity of the people of East Timor, the divergences arose to such an extent as to lead to an armed conflict. The present armed conflict, however, which we are encouraged to see as a fratricidal war, is,in fact,a struggle between the superior strength of the regular Indonesian army and those forces originally involved in the safeguarding of the identity of the Timorese people.

DOCTRINAL PRINCIPLES

Having experienced with the People all the events, which, since 1975, have deeply affected the social and political life of this same People, the Church bears anxious witness to facts that are slowly leading to the ethnic, cultural and religious extinction of the identity of the People of East Timor.

The Church wholeheartedly proclaims and desires Peace, friendship and well-being for all peoples. The Church affirms with the strength that comes from its own mission that "the people are sovereign over their own destiny" (RH, No. 17, cfr. PP No. 65)*.

The Church understands this principle to mean that the people have rights, which are necessary to safeguard in any and every circumstance.

In our times, in which social awareness has grown enormously, no people freely accepts being governed by another. Only a real respect for such rights endows legitimacy to any regime. Furthermore the right of authority can only be understood in the context of objective and inviolable human rights.

The Church is also convinced that the violation of human rights is linked to the violation of the rights of a nation, with which Man is intimately tied, as it were to a greater family.

We recognize that the Indonesian government has undertaken development in several sectors of the social life in East Timor, such as in schooling, agriculture, the media, transport and health. On the other hand, since 1975 and to the present, the people of East Timor have suffered the horrors of war, a war they did not want. There is no harmony among its children; the well-being and happiness desired by all are far from being reality for the majority of the people. The Timorese people are exhausted, their dearest hopes are frustrated and they have been deluded by so many promises. That is why we must have the courage to go to the roots of all these ills. All parties involved in this conflict must assume their own responsibilities. We cannot divide them into good and evil.

Keeping a clear head, free from political bias and preconceived ideas, let us examine the facts. We cannot build the future on a present undermined by past mistakes. We must have the courage to analyze these errors of the past to enable the goal to which all aspire to be reached after the cause of such ills has been removed.

ANALYSIS

Throughout centuries the Church in East Timor has shared the lot of the People and the social and political conditions that have affected their lives. That is why the Church in East Timor has always been present and has identified

with the Timorese people, rejoicing in the satisfaction of the people towards order, prosperity and freedom, and being sorrowful at the sadness of the people towards oppression, errors and misfortune. Difficult times for the people of East Timor have also been difficult for the Church.

After nine years of occupation by the Indonesian government of this territory, which it considers to be an integral part of the Indonesian nation, the war which they would have us believe to be a civil war goes on and continues to grow, which is witnessed by the constant arrival of Indonesian troops together with heavy war material, the deployment of more than 10 military helicopters for operational purposes and of several airforce combat aircraft. In view of the permanent insecurity of the population in many regions of East Timor, the continuous exodus of the Timorese people, forced migrations to resettlement camps and the absence of freedom of circulation, we think that the moment has come to put the following questions:

Is all this merely brought about by a stubborn minority or does it reveal something deeper about the demand for basic rights of the people ?

The Church believes that the people of East Timor feel that fundamental human rights have been violated. Among these rights is the right of the Timorese people to choose and direct their own future. This means in fact the right to govern one's life according to one's own identity.

The Indonesian government proceeds from the assumption that the people of East Timor have already exercised their right to self-determination. However, as the necessary conditions for this have not yet been created, the Church considers that here resides one of the causes behind the situation of anguish experienced by the people of East Timor over the last nine years. A war that continues for nine years cannot be imputed to the blind obstinacy of a minority.

If that were so, what would then be the explanation of the arrests, disappearances and the deportation of thousands of civilians during these nine years ? On the other hand, if the majority of the Timorese people have already chosen their future, why then do they continue to be persecuted and eliminated ?

These are the questions that come to mind to anyone who has witnessed all the events which have taken place since August 1975. It is therefore a necessary and urgent prerequsite for peace, social harmony and well-being that the Timorese people effectively enjoy all their basic human rights.

ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

All human beings aspire to fullfil their own personal identity as an integral part of the environment in which they live. When internal or external factors lead to a divorce or, even more serious, to loss of this identity, the person as such is annihilated.

In East Timor we are witnessing an upheaval of gigantic and tragic proportions in the social and cultural framework of the Timorese people, whose identity is threatened by destruction. Each community and ethnic group has its own identity. In each community there is a set of cultural patterns and models of behaviour which are acquired by each of its members and that determine common feelings and attitudes. This common core of feelings and attitudes which all the members of a same society share, forms what some scientists call the fundamental framework of their personalities.

This is not the time to study the identity of the Timorese people. In the midst of this catastrophy that is afflicting the people of East Timor, the Church concentrates its attention on the individual and cannot help but proclaim the message of salvation and human dignity, whilst condemning injustice and the threat to human dignity.

1. The ethnic identity of the Timorese people is being gravely violated and threatened as the following facts demonstrate:

a) Successive, systematic and regular 'cleaning-up operations' of the Indonesian army against centers of resistance.

b) The permanent threat of reprisals with summary execution by shooting of men and youths of the villages which are considered to be sympathetic, refuge or support for the resistance forces.

c) The enlistment of minors as auxiliary forces in military operations.

d) Waves of arrests of villagers, even the most simple and humble peasants.

e) The inefficiency of sanitary assistance to the population for numerous illnesses many of which are endemic.

f) The concentration of the population in resettlement camps in inhuman conditions without recourse to self-sufficiency making it dependent on irregular supplies.

g) The recruiting of the more able members of the population and their preparation for military operations.

h) The compulsory night-watch duty which is carried out under inhuman conditions.

i) The systematic occupation of key-posts in the public administration by Indonesians, generally belonging to the military, which means a gradual expulsion of the Timorese.

j) The gotong-royong ('Mutual-help Program') which is being carried out in ignorance of people's needs.

2. RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

The Timorese people live their religious beliefs. They recognize the existence of the Maromac, supreme being, as the source of all temporal and spiritual wealths. They worship lulics (sacred relics) and have the cult of the souls of their forefathers. Sacred houses are built where the instruments of the cult are kept.

After the arrival of the Catholic missionaries many Timorese abandonned animism and became Christians. Today there are about 400.000 Catholics in East Timor.

To ignore the religious tradition of the Timorese, even that of animism, and to attribute the same standing to Christianity as to other religions, is an attempt to destroy the people's beliefs. On the ethic and moral level the Timorese people live according to the principles of the Gospel and Christian morals.

By accusing priests, arresting those who teach the catechism, banishing and slaughtering the Christians, they are attempting to put an end to the religious feelings of the people and, as a consequence, the identity of the Timorese people itself.

3. CULTURAL IDENTITY

"In general terms, the word culture means all things by which Man perfects and develops the multiple capacities of his mind and body; endeavoring by his study and efforts to master the world around him, making it more human through the progress of customs and institutions; and finally, in time, culture has become communication with others and preserves in its works the great spiritual experiences and apsirations so that they may benefit many people and even humanity as a whole" (GS No. 53)*.

The people of East Timor have their own way of expressing their feelings through legends, stories and traditions that are manifested in certain usages and customs.

In contact with the Portuguese civilization and under the influence of Christianity, this culture has taken on new

forms and values of expression which provide the Timorese with a notion of their own historic identity. In short : There is a Timorese culture that is made up of words, attitudes, emotions, reactions, behaviour, ways of being and seeing the world. It is in these things that the people recognize their own culture and in it their own identity. They take pride in it and feel security in this background to their own future.

All attempts to hinder or to prevent this evolution would be an attack that the people of East Timor like any other people would find intolerable.

The attempt to indonsianize the Timorese people through powerful Pancasila (Indonesian State Ideology)- Campaigns, schooling and media, by divorcing the people from their own weltanschauung, represents a slow assassination of Timorese culture. To kill their culture is to kill the people themselves.

"Rich or poor, each country has its own civilization passed down from its forefathers with institutions required by earthly life and higher manifestations - artistic, intellectual and religious - of the spiritual life. When the latter possess true human values, then it is a great mistake to sacrifice them to the former. A people which gave its consent to this would lose the best of itself, it would sacrifice its own reason for living in the misapprehension that it was seeking life itself. The words of Christ are also true for the peoples: What use is the whole world to a man, if he must lose his soul ?" (PP Nr. 40, Mt. 16.26)*

CONCLUSION

These considerations and this judgement of conscience the Catholic Church in East Timor addresses to the Indonesian government. As we have previously mentioned, the motive behind this action is the awareness of a sacred duty of faithfulness to the divine mission of the Church itself and absolute fidelity to the people to whom we were sent to proclaim Truth, Justice, Love and Human Dignity according to the spirit of the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church.

We appeal with the greatest urgency and energy for total respect for the fundamental human rights and ethnic, cultural and religious identity of the people of East Timor.

We also appeal that conditions indispensable for an open, frank and fruitful dialogue between the different parties involved in the problem should be created, in which especially the People of East Timor, represented by the active movements, whether inside the country or abroad, should take part free from any form of coercion.

* NOTES

RH - Encyclical "Redemptor Hominis"

PP - Encyclical "Populorum Progressio"

GS - Encyclical "Gaudium et Spes"

The Apostolic Administrator and
the Council of Priests of the Diocese of
Dili

Dili, January 1st, 1985

Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo
(Apostolic Administrator)